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ABSTRACT

This monograph is a compilation of comments written by elementary level classmates of students with severe disabilities, produced as part of Maine's statewide project for inclusive schools, Project LEARNS (Local Education for All in Regular Neighborhood Schools). The comments are grouped into six categories: (1) valuing differences and overcoming fears, (2) recognizing gifts and capabilities, (3) developing friendships, (4) learning from one another, (5) recommendations, and (6) additional stories. (DB)

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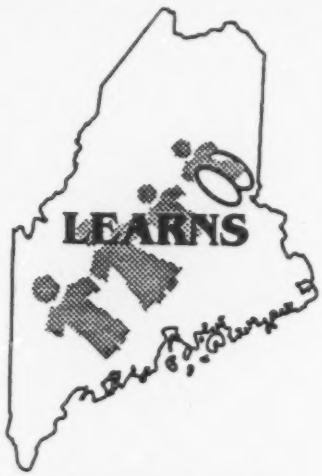
CREATING INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITIES

A Monograph Series



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Number 3

Kids Talk About Inclusive Classrooms

Edited by

Lucille Zeph, Deborah Gilmer, Darris Brewer-Allen and Jan Moulton

1992

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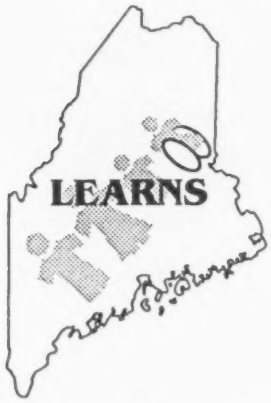

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Lucille Zeph, Deborah Gilmer, Darris Brewer-Allen and Jan Moulton

Local Education for All in Regular Neighborhood Schools
College of Education • University of Maine

1992

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Previous Publications:

Creating Inclusive Educational Communities: A Monograph Series

Number 1—Creating Inclusive Schools: A Resource Guide (1991)

Number 2—Creating Positive Educational Programs for Students Presenting Challenging Behavior: An Annotated Bibliography (1991)

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Acknowledgements

The students, parents, teachers and administrators from schools in the Central Maine area deserve the credit for this monograph. Students with disabilities, including severe disabilities, receive their educational programs in regular classrooms in these schools. Without the support of the building level staff and the districts' commitment to inclusion the stories that comprise this volume could not have been written. In these schools, ALL students are benefitting from the efforts of the administrators, parents achers and support staff assuring that ALL students learn together in regular classes.

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Introduction

Creating Inclusive Educational Communities is a monograph series developed by LEARNS, Maine's Statewide Project for Inclusive Schools. This volume, Kids Talk About Inclusive Classrooms is a compilation of stories written by classmates of students with severe disabilities.

The stories of classmates and friends provide testimony to the importance of valuing all people and welcoming all students as integral members of their school communities. The writings of students exemplify the fact that friendship enhances the educational experiences of all children. Their stories appear as they were submitted and have not been edited for spelling or grammatical errors.

Loneliness,

Separate, Alone

Crying, Hiding, Hurting

Reaching Out To Others

Caring, Sharing, Laughing

Belonging, Together

Friendship

Darris Brewer-Allen
Jan Moulton
1992

Section One

Valuing Differences and Overcoming Fears

Children are bombarded from all sides with the message that different is bad. People who do not conform to arbitrary ideals are labeled misfits, and we are taught to shun them. Isolated by our ignorance, we learn to fear that which we do not understand.

Many of the kids at the regular school had never had a chance to be around a person with disabilities before, and some of them were scared. Then they met Phil and the other new kids and — in spite of the seizures and the wheelchairs, in spite of the fact that many of them could not speak — they became friends.

Left to their own devices, children are able to see beyond the differences to the person inside — to appreciate the infinite variety of humanity.

We can learn a lot from kids.

****

☆*The reason why I like Mike in my class is because he is different. And sometimes when nobody wants to play with me it is fun to play with Mike!*

Heather, Age 9

☆*When Mike came to our classroom I was frightened. But when the days went y Mike got nicer and fun. We share Mike in the classrooms. When Mike has a seizure I get scared. Thank-you.*

Danielle, Age 9

☆Mike has really changed my life. But in a good way! I like Mike alot. he's a lot of fun to be with. He has ways of talking too,he smiles for yes and drops his head for no. I was scared of Mike before because I've never been around a handicaped person before.

Megan, Age 10

☆When I first met Mike I was shocked. It's been very fun having Mike. If Mike could talk I often wonder what he would say.

Kevin, Age 10

☆Having Philip in my class was a different experience. A responsibilitiy we all were involved with, hands on.

He sometimes said things that nobody understood, except himself. This was disturbing to the class, but he was fun to be around. He had a somewhat different schedule than the rest of the class, so he wasn't always there for lessons that we had to pay close attention to.

We had to be careful of what we said and did around him. He would here what we would say, good, foul, or personal, and repeat it. One student in particular babied him more than a mother does her child, and it got really annoying. Every body else treated like one of them. Which is how I think he wanted to be treated. Some students made him make inappropriate decisions, and take inappropriate actions. I don't think Phil knew better. Sometimes we would catch him before he did something like this, and made sure he didn't do it.

Having a student like Phil around was exciting, and I'm looking forward to next year, Darcey is going to be on my seventh grade homeroom. She is disabled and in a wheelchair, but she's also a great kid!

Sincerely, Miles, Grade 6

☆Having Phil in our class was Really strang at first. Then it wasn't strange. I think other classes should have people like Philin there class too. Except some people in our class told him stuff to do. I don't think that should happen.

Katie, Grade 6

☆ *I don't think there is any bad thing about students with handicaps. I think it's nice to have someone diferant in my class.*

Unsigned, Grade 4

Megan
age 10

Mike has really changed my life. But in a good way! I like Mike a lot. He's a lot of fun to be with. He has ways of talking too, he smiles for yes and drops his head for no. I was scared of Mike before because I've never been around a handicaped person before.

Joshua Richard age 10 10

I think Mike is unique!
He is very special because he is funny, awesome and of course he is nice!
He is nice to be with when I read with him and push his wheelchair.

Section Two

Recognizing Gifts and Capabilities

Sometimes we are blinded by our expectations. And it takes a child — full of curiosity and free from misconceptions — to open our eyes to what has been there all along.

The kids from participating schools — like many other people — may have started out with low or negative expectations for their new classmates. It did not take them long to figure out that they were wrong.

Children are observant. They notice what their friends cannot do, but they also take the time to discover what they <u>can</u> do. They are quick to point out others' faults, but are equally quick to applaud their achievements.

Their friends tell us that Mark and Phil are good at spelling and math and that Mike never gives away their secrets. They tell us that Matt and Jason are good writers and that Bobby Dee is definitely <u>not</u> dumb.

Learning to recognize others' gifts and capabilities teaches us to be more aware of our own.

We can learn a lot from kids.

****

☆*What I Like about Mike is that when you tell Mike a secret he never tells it. When you doing math he helps by holding your book. He is great, believe me.*

Jamie, Age 10

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☆ I think having Michael in our class was very different; for me at least. I've never had a h andicapped kid in my class before, except a few kids with broken arms or legs.

Michael can't talk, walk, or move much, but he can do things that we can't do, advantages like: computer time while we have to do our math, and having someone read to him every day.

Not every classroom has a handicapped kid. Mike may not be able to move alot, but he's one swell guy!

Erin, Age 10

☆ I think Phil did a wonderful job this year! He has learned alot. He picks things up very fast and I think being in a class were people know right rom wrong helped him. He has gotten to know alot of great people. He is a very smart and talented boy. As I said he has done very well this year and I'm sure he will do great next year!!

Sincerely, Alexis, Grade 6

☆ I have enjoyed having Phil in my classroom. It is interesting to learn what "special" children think of people and things.

Throughout the year, Phil has amazed us with his ability to spell, learn math, and even has learned some things from some not-so-good sources, he usually acts well.

Occasionally Phil might be rude speak out of turn, etc., but he still learns, eventually, not to do so.

Sincerely, Erik, Grade 6

☆ I think that the program we are doing is great! Working with people with handicaps teaches kids that just becasue they're differnt doesn't mean they're dumb!

Working with Bobby Dee inspired me to think different about students with handicaps. I used to think I had to be perfect for them, but NO MORE!

I don't like the idea that most people whell B.D. around <u>they wnat to go</u>. Not where <u>Bobby Dee wants to go</u>. I think is unfair for her.

Otherwise I think this program is fine!

Unsigned, Grade 4

☆ My opinion is that people are doing a great job with handicapped people. I like haveing handicap people in are class becaus they can teach us that they can do anything we can do.

Gem, Grade 4

☆ My feelings about Mark is that he was o.k. But I think that if hes not going to be in the classroom more, um he shouldn't be here. I hope that he would be able to do stuff. After all hes an o.k. guy. We all hope that some day he will be able to graduate like all of us.

Unsigned, Grade 5

☆ I like how Matt learned to litsin well! I feel hepful I feel kind.

I like how Jason youst to poke people in eyes and now he dose not!

Chris, Grade 1-2

☆ I feel good. He's good and funny. He's getting better at using his braces.

Matt, Grade 1

☆ I think he's a great student. He's funny and great in class.

Betsy, Grade 1

Jason

He is fun.
He does Good
Writing.
He is Good
at hot Poking.
I Like to
play with him.

Chris Matt

Matt is Good
at Following
directions.
He is Good
at writing.
He is fun.

Section Three

Developing Friendships

Most of us take friendships for granted. We cannot imagine what it would be like to be shut off from the warmth of simple human interactions without a single friend.

Kids with disabilities are often denied the opportunity to have, or to be, friends because of their external differences. Some of them can not walk and some of them can not speak, so we assume they have nothing in common with kids who can.

Friendships grow out of shared experiences — like listening to music and to each other; going shopping or swimming together and telling jokes, laughing and playing. The students who wrote these letters about their friends tell us in no uncertain terms that once they got to know each other, the differences were more interesting than important.

We can learn a lot from kids.

****

☆ *In all these years wondering what handicaps are and finding out what handicap is I made a friend (Mike) I love his smiling and we care for him. He's ch anged our lives Mike is very smart and can talkby using facal expressions. They are crying, smiling, or coughing. Mike's a good friend.*

Zachary, age 11

☆ *Mike has changed the way this classroom runs. I enjoy his company and he is a good friend. Some times he comes on feild trips with us. That is fun to.*

James, age 10

☆I enjoyed every minute of Michael. He may be differnet but we don't care. Michael is funloving, fun to be with, and moust of all he likes to see us smile. I love him! He has cool clothes, nice hair, and a terrific smile.

Issac, Age 10

☆I think that Mike is a very nice kid.
The reason I think this is that everyone likes him.
For mike to be inour class it showed me that just because he is handicaped dosen't mean he is all that different.
there are alot of ways that he is the same as all the people in this classroom.

your classmate, Luke, Age 9

☆I think having Mike in our class is a very different experience for me. I have never been near a handicapped person before now so it feels very strange. But I got use to it. I never thought I would. I learned that he can not tlak with his mouth. but he as special signs so I can under stand him. He uses movements. I really enjoy reading to Mike as well. He's a great person and a great friend. I think it is great to have him in my class!

Jennifer, Age 9 1/2

☆Some fantastic things about Mike is that he intrduced me to a whole new world, before I met h im at challenge baseball I never really thought that people like him existed. He's really nice to see him smile it s fun to read to him I'm very glad that he's going to be in my class next year.

Sincerely, Jed, Age 10

☆The special ed child in my class is Phil. He started not even being an aquantence. Noe Phil and I are good friends. When ever I walk in the room Phil always greets me with a happy "Mark." I become beet red, but love being with him. He is always there and willing to give me five. Many people don't understand why and what he says but I do. When he says somthing out of the blue I compliment him and talk to him nicly and calmly. Maybe I dont understand him fully but he is a good friend.

Mark, Grade 6

☆Dear Bobby Dee

I liked Bobby Dee in my class. I hope I'm in her class next year. Bobby Dee was fund to have around I think nothing is wrong with the program it is fun having students wiht handicaps around the playground it is great!!!

Your friend

P.S. Bobby Dee is great!!!!!

☆I thought that haveing Bobby Dee was fun and I think Bobby Dee like it when students read to her Thier wasn't anything bad about the program.

Unsigned, Grade 4

☆I think its great having students with handicaps. I think Bobby Dee and ot her kids like Mark, Darcy, Heidi, and etc. like it too!

Bobby Dee is great to have around she makes like great for me. She and other kids ar too!

Amy, Grade 4

☆ I liked the program with Bobby dee and every one. I like Bobby Dee. Becuse I like pushing her around the playground. and I like going swimming with boddy dee. I thind this is a good program. I like all the students with handicaps.

Unsigned, Grade 4

☆ This program form the handicapse made them popular. Most people wounlddn't think of the handicape, but when you work with them you can become buddys. I can't think of something wrong in the program. So I guess it's o.k.

Unsigned, Grade 4

☆ I think that the program is nice beuse it gives tham a chans so be whit other people. This is my opinian. I like people at clearevew alot.

I think it is hard for bobby dee to do alot of things but she dos them.

The only bad th ing is that people down't like haveing bobby dee in thar class becuse thay think it is to nocey but I downt I like her alot. I just hope I'm in her class next year.

Unsigned, Grade 4

☆ I think Mark was really cool he acted really good. He loves music. He be around more kids. He is cool. He is asome.

Unsigned, Grade 5

☆ My year with Mark

I had fun with Mark this year.
he was a good friend
he was funny
he was fun

Keith, Grade 5

☆ I thought Mark coming to my class was good. He was friend. The only thing I'd like to change is that he should be int he class more often.

Unsigned, Grade 5

☆ I liked having Mark in my class it was fun to do things with Mark. I like my little buddy Mark he's pretty cool.

Chris, Grade 5

☆ This year I thought Mark was a good friend h e was always smiling. I liked that. Mark all ways liked Mr. Armandi's stories. But I think Mark should be in the classroom more often.

Garrett, Grade 5

☆ Jason

Jason he is a good friend. I do now like Jason whe he poles people in the eye. Jason learned how not to poke people in ey Good job Jason

Matt

Matt he knows how to count better. I do now like when Matt said shut up. Matt imgroved! Good job.

Trafton, Grade 1-2

☆ I feel good, and glad that we have him here. And he's my friend.

Jessica, Grade 1

Jon London

Jason
has learned
Not to be bad
I Don't like
it when he
hits me
I go off the
slide with him

Matt
he likes to
play basketball
I don't like
it when he
kisses me
I play Basket-
ball with him

Section Four

Learning from One Another

We tend to classify people into discrete and opposing categories — either teachers or learners, givers or takers — as if it were impossible to do both at once.

The kids from participating schools teach and learn from one another. Classmates model appropriate (and sometimes not so appropriate!) behavior from their new classmates. They show them what's cool and what's not.

And, in return, the kids with disabilities offer their new friends the chance to learn about diversity, courage, determination and acceptance — lessons that are not easily taught when students attend separate classrooms or schools.

The best and most meaningful relationships are those built on reciprocity — mutual giving and taking.

We all have a lot to learn from one another. We can learn a lot from kids.

****

☆*Having Mike in our class in a good experienbce for a kid my age. Mike is as much fun as educational. He taught me that not everyone is the same and many other things I can't explain. He's fun because you can go swimming and shopping, also when you read soemthing funny he smiles, so that means he's listening.*

When I came to the open house at school I saw the name Micheal _____ on a desk, I wondered what he looked like and if was nice. I never heard the name before, on the firest day of school I asked noe mof my friends if they heard of Mike _____. When one of his helpers walked in and said, "This is Micheal _____." I wondered if he cou ld walk or talk. I soon found out that he is the same as y ou and me but have different disabilities. Now Micheal _____ is my best friend and I like him alot.

Tiffany, age 10

☆Having Mike in the classroom is interesting. What I mean by interestinbg is that Mike teachs us stuff and we teach him stuff. He taught me that people don't have to be the same to communicate together, and that people are different but they still have the same feelings inside.

Jessica, age 10

☆I learned alot from Mike. I learned that he can't talk with his mouth, but, he can talk with his eyes and his movements. At first I didn't like him because I thought he was different, but as the year passed I learned that he is not much differnet than I am. He is very special. I am glad he is in my class Every body in my class gets a chance to be his helper. I am glad when it is my turn.

April, age 9

☆Having Micheal in our classroom is anew experience. Because I can learn how handicapped kids live, eat, and even how they communicate. He's great!

Rebecca, age 9

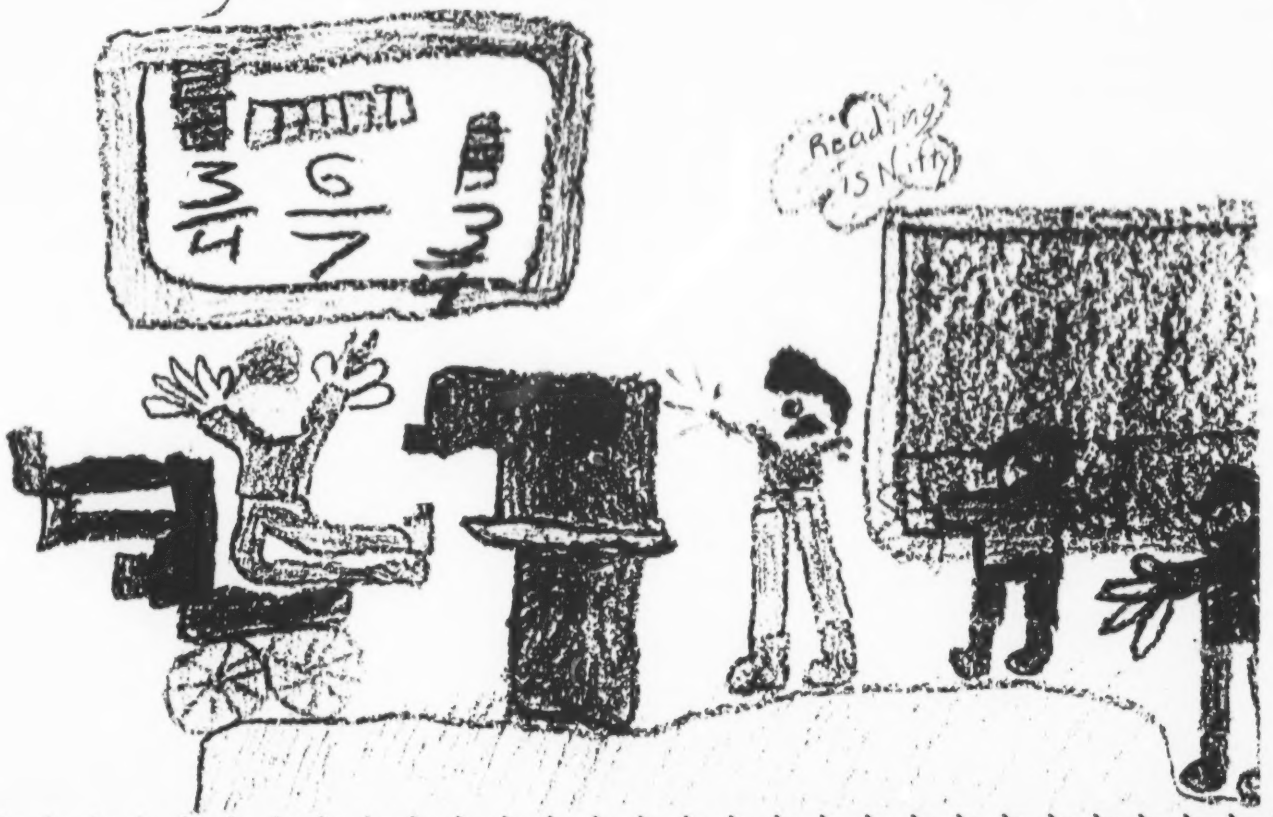
☆I think it is fun having Micheal in our class. One reason why I like having Michael in our class is because we can learn to help take care of a handi-capped person. And another reason is we can go on field trips and miss work.

Michael, age 10

☆Having Michel in our class has been a great influence, and also a great experience.

Abel, age 10

T is for Teaching Stacy and Stacy Teaching us



In my opinion their is nothing
rong with Bobby Dee in our class
but I would like to have our ther
schools to have someone like Bobby
Dee in their class. I like the idea
beauss its good to learn about how
to actid around disabled people.
I feel bad for Bobby Dee because
She is not able to do the things
we do you no like run,
play sports.

Well Bye!

☆Having Mike in our class is the most exciting thing that ever happened to me, not just because we get to go on fieldtrips, its because he's taught me how to relate to different types of people. Not that he's different, he's special.

He's changed my life in a good way!!

Stefanie, age 10

☆I enjoy Mike in my class because he helps me leaarn what handicapped people are like. I learned that Mike can talk too. But he talks with his fingers and not his mouth. I learned how to massage people properly. I know that when I massage Mike and it hurts him he will tighten his muscles.

Sincerely, Jared, age 9

☆I like having Phil in my class. I think that he's learned alto afrom me and I've learned alot from him.

Sincerely, Mrs. Cates, 6th grade class

☆I like haivng a disable person in my class. I think it is probably very helpful to then and educational for us. I'm sure he's learning a lot from the kids, (not all good through.)

Sincerely, Kage, grade 6

☆I think having phil in the class was fun and educauonal we all learned aobut handicaped people it was very fun but I think phil should've bee in the class more often he was never here.

Ryan, grade 6

☆I think that it is great because he can learn alittel bit of things that other kids learn. And it helps us learn to help handycap kids like Mark.

Jessie, grade 5

☆I think it was fu n to be abal to help Mark. I think it was good for us to learn more about disabaled kids. And help them.

Daneca, grade 5

☆In my opinion their is nothing rong with Bobby Dee in our class but I would like to have outher schools to have someone like Bobby Dee in their class. I like the ieda because it's good to learn about how to acted around disabled people. I feel bad for Bobby Dee because she is not able to do the things we do you kn like run, play sports.
Well Bye!

Unsigned, grade 4

☆I like the Lerning program. It helps me more with skills with handicapped students. I think having Bobby Dee in my class has made learning fun.

David, grade 4

☆I think it is fine just the way it is. It is so fun having them here. We can learn a lot of stuff from them.. They always make me smile.

Melissa, grade 4

☆ I think the program is good, because, they can learn from us and we can learn from them. It is fun because th have parties and the summer program. I also think it's good because it gives students and students with handicaps a good education.

Adam, grade 4

☆ I don't think there is any problem with having students with handicaps in our school. I also think it is good because they get to meet new people and gets to go places.

Cole, grade 4

☆ I think having Bobby Dee in my class is a good learning ability for both her and I, Bobby Dee is one of my favorite people to be around. Bobby Dee helps me learn about things, and I help her. I that having Bobby Dee in the classroom is great!

Bobby Dee's friend, Jackie, grade 4

☆ Boby d is fun to have around. becaws we can h opl he we learned a lot. if she wernt here no knows. she has lots of friends to.

Unsigned, grade 4

Section Five

Recommendations

Sometimes, children see things much more clearly than supposedly wiser adults. We tend to make things much more complicated than they need to be.

For years we have insisted that inclusive schools just would not work, that separate classes and segregated programs were the only possible way to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities.

LEARNS tries another way: kids with disabilities have the opportunity to be an integral and fully participating members of regular classes. But, as their friends have noted, there are still times when they are pulled out for "special" services.

The students who have written to tell us about their friends say that inclusion is a good idea — as far as it goes. But why, they ask, is it still necessary to leave sometimes? Why not arrange it so that all kids can be in regular classrooms all the time?

We can learn a lot from kids.

****

☆ *In my opinion there are no stuff that are wrong. I thank that the students with handicaps should get to do more stuff like a little more writinng, playing games and having more fun. I like having Bobby Dee with us.*

Nicole, grade 4

☆ *Mark was good in class but he should be in class more. and should use the elevator so he is not late for classes.*

Unsigned, grade 5

☆Phil acts werid some of the times. He shouts out and distrubs us. Bu t he is nice to be around most of the time. Sometimes people make fun of him by telling him to dance. Than they laugh at him. People also tell him to say things and do things. Sometimes it bad.

I think he should go to school with other people. It's helpful most of the time. He's fun to be with.

6th grade student

☆I think Mark did very well with other kids his age and I think that he should b in the class room more often and he should have more then one helper.

Jeff, grade 5

☆I do not have know problem with the program. My opinion of it is good and I think it would be fun for them to be able to go out and have fun like we do.

Even thour some of them are handicape and some arn't I think they can have a lot of fun.

Mindy, grade 4

☆I think it was fun have Make in my class. I think be shode be in the class most of the time.

Margaret, grade 5

☆This year I liked the subjects we did with him. I would like Mark to be in the class room more often so he can be with the class. I think he should be in more activities.

Luke, grade 5

☆I think Mark was very good this year, but I think students should do more things with Mark.

Amanda, grade 5

☆Phil has b' :n very good. He is even doing are spelling. But he has a problem with speech iff you ask his somthing he says yes all the time. And iff you tell him something he will do it. Even iff you tell to do something bad. I think it would be better if keds like Phil would go to a regular school.

Sincerely, Timothy, grade 6

☆I thought it was fun having Mark in my class in 5th grade.
I think that he shou ld learn more stuff and be in the class more.

Evita, grade 5

☆I liked having Mark in my class.
I think we should do mre activities with him. I think we should be able to go swimming with him. And I think he should be in the class room more often.

Faith, grade 5

☆I think that the program went good. And I like the hole thing. I think that he souwd be in the class more often.

Chris, grade 5

☆It was fun having Mark in our class but I wish he would be in the class more often.

Unsigned, grade 5

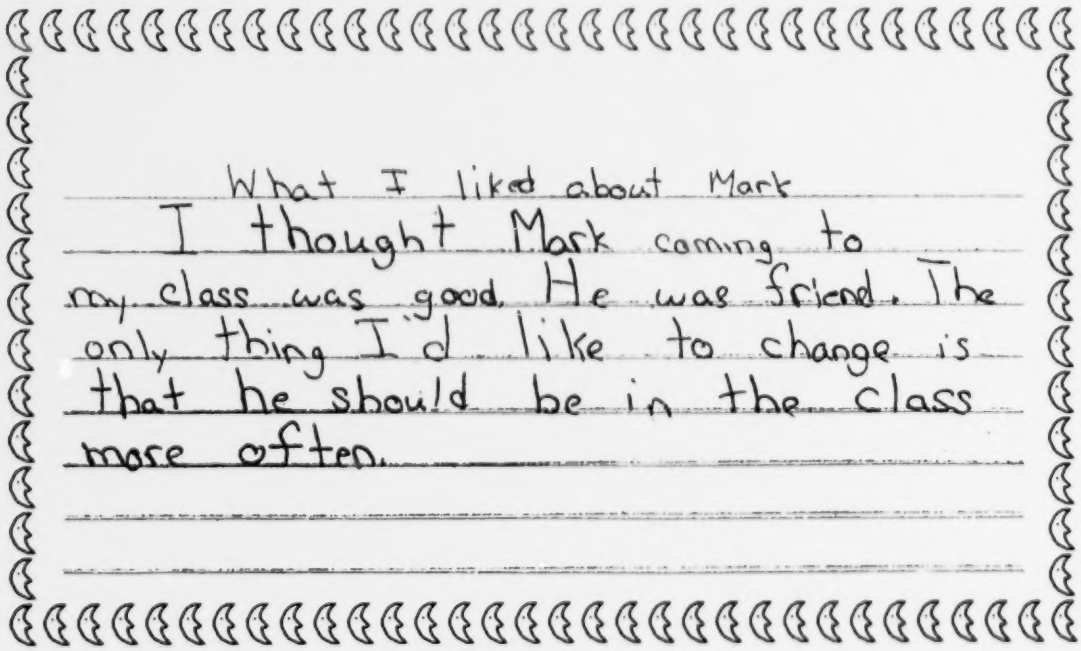
☆ I'm writing about Phil. He is a great person. But I think he should be in class more. He gets taken out of class everyday. He is very good on the computer.

Phil is like a person who is very polite. He is actully better than most students. He is a very nice friend.

Sincerely, John, Grade 6

☆ Phil is a good friend of mine. He is a good worker and he is very funny but, he should do more with the class. He is always off cooking of cleaning the teachers room. All in alll he is a very nice guy.

Sincerely yours, Brady, Grade 6


What I liked about Mark
I thought Mark coming to my class was good. He was friend. The only thing I'd like to change is that he should be in the class more often.

To, Whom it may concern,

I like having Phil in my class. I think that he's learned alot from me and I've learned alot from him.

Sincerely,
Mrs Cates
6th
grade
class

Section Six

Additional Stories

Ms. Saulter's Grade 2 class at the Brookside School in Waterville chose to relate their friendship with Stacy by writing an ABC book.

Ms. Cook's Grade 1 class at the Benton Elementary School in MSAD 49 developed a book about their friend Matt who was to enter a new school the following year. They felt it was very important to let his new friends and classmates know things about him that they had learned over the course of the year.

The students in these two classes have obviously developed caring and compassion for their new friends.

We can learn a lot from kids.

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✩ ABC Book About Stacy ✩

Authors and Illustrators: Ms. Saulter's Grade 2 Class,
Brookside School, Waterville, Maine.

This ABC book is dedicated to Stacy, because she is extra special to Ms. Saulter's class. We all love her and enjoy having her in our classroom.

A special thanks to Project LEARNS for allowing Stacy to be in a regular classroom with all of us.

A is for Amazing Stacy.
B is for Being a special person in the class.
C is for Cooking with Stacy.
D is for Doing things with Dice.
E is for Stacy Eating apple sauce.
F is for Fantastic Friend.
G is for Getting around in her wheelchair.
H is for Helping Stacy with her weather board.
I is for Ice cold water that Stacy drinks.
J is for Jiggling and Jingling puzzle pieces in her cup.
K is for Keeping her hands to herself.
L is for Learning sigh Language from Stacy.
M is for Music. Stacy enjoys Music.
N is for Number One Stacy!
O is for Stacy Opening the door.
P is for Stacy Participating in Project learns.
Q is for Quick Stacy.
R is for Reading to Stacy on the Rug.
S is for Stacy Swinging on her Swing.
T is for Teaching Stacy and Stacy Teaching us.
U is for Using the computer.
V is for Stacy's Very Vicious hands going wild.
W is for Wheeling her Wheelchair and Winning.
X is for an eXtra special girl.
Y is for Yacking away with Stacy.
Z is for Zipping and Zooming around the gym.

Editor's Note: Marvelous illustrations accompanied each page in its original form. Unfortunately it was not possible to include them all here. We extend our apologies to these young artists.

OUR FRIEND MATTHEW

by

Mrs. Cook and her First Grade Class
Benton Elementary School, Benton, Maine
Maine School Administrative District #49

We have been friends with Matthew for a whole school year. We call him Matt. He likes school because he loves people.

Every morning he kisses his Grammie and Grampy, and says goodbye to his two dogs, six cats, and two parrots and boards the school bus. He probably wonders, as we do, what exciting things will happen at school each year.

At first Matt didn't understand what to do in his classroom. He used to clap his hands, and throw toys and spit. We showed him the "right way" to work in a group. He has learned SO-o-o-o-o much this year! He never seems to throw things or spit now. He doesn't clap much any more either. He wants to be with his friends.

Popsicle sticks and building straws are some of Matt's favorite toys. He likes bright colors too.

Matthew really doesn't like loud noises or standing in lines. If he gets nervous or excited he sits on the floor. We just walk away because we know he'll join us in a minute.

At reading time Matthew works on his computer. Once-in-a-while we get to have special computer time with him.

Matt has trouble understanding everything people say to him, so he uses lots of picture signs and some sign language. That's just the way he was born. We help him by taking turns being his buddy..

When we are his buddy, Matt likes us to hold his hand firmly. He feels real sure we know what we are doing if we hang on that way. Many times he will thank us with a big hug. It's nice to be appreciated!

Our friend Matt likes to jump on the mini-trampoline. Sometimes we jump and giggle together. Do you like the parachute? Matt loves to use the parachute in gym. He also likes to sit on the mat and play catch.

Another favorite part of the school day is snack break. Matt loves to go with his buddy and get his own snack. Who doesn't like snack break?

Lunch time is also a part of the day that we all like. Matthew walks with his buddy to the lunch room. He is learning to point to make his own food choices. He is using his silverware more often too.

On sunny days we go out on the playground. Matt likes to swing with us and climb up on the slide and look around.

Matt doesn't talk much. (Sometimes he says "good job"). He does make some noises. At first they bothered us a little. Now we all have learned to concentrate on our own jobs. Mrs. Cook, our teacher, says we could win a blue ribbon in concentrating. Matt has taught us how.

In the wintertime we went roller skating. Matt loved the lights and the music. We sat on the bench and enjoyed it together.

We need to remember that Matt can do lots of things himself. Matt works hard on tasks that are different from ours. He is learning to stay with us at group time, walk with us in a line to other parts of the building, and communication. He needs our help, but he needs to learn to be independent too, just like all of us.

Mrs. Cook says everyone in our room is a learner and a teacher. This is true. We used to be afraid of kids with handicaps. Matt has taught us to understand more about them. We were lucky to have Matthew in our class this year.

Editor's Note: "Our Friend Matthew," in its original form, included color photographs of Matt with his friends and engaged in various lessons and activities in his classroom and school. Unfortunately it was not possible to reproduce quality copies. Our apologies to Mrs. Cook and her entire class.

F is for Fantastic Friend.